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University of Bath

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RUNNING HEAD VERSO: SIMON HAYHOE

SEND REVIEW TO: sh2337@bath.ac.uk

Sight Correction: Vision and blindness in Eighteenth-Century Britain? By Chris Mounsey
(Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2019) 323 pp. \$79.50 cloth \$39.50 paper

Although substantial histories of emotional, physical, intellectual, and sensory impairment have proliferated ~~over-thoroughout~~ the past century, the historical study of disability as community is a relatively recent ~~disciplineendeavor~~. As these studies have diversified, separate epistemologies that examine disability as a social phenomenon and impairments as a cultural phenomenon have evolved, particularly in ~~English-English~~-speaking countries. However, ~~in this discipline there are~~ few historical works ~~that~~ try to address these separate approaches in a single coherent narrative. In *Sight Correction*, ~~Chris~~ Mounsey attempts to develop such a narrative by surveying the intellectual and literary understanding of visual impairment as disability in Britain (by which he means Wales, England, and Scotland) ~~in-during~~ the eighteenth century.

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As his analytical method, Mounsey employs a variability approach, ~~one~~ that examines individuals within a given era, ~~and which, he argues, is~~ in lieu of, ~~as he argues~~, an effective cultural model of disability. Importantly, this variability approach is designed to ~~subjectively~~ examine ~~closely the~~ individuals ~~that-who~~ inhabited an era and an epistemological space—philosophers, vision scientists, ophthalmologists, surgeons, and writers, who were visually impaired,—rather than ~~to objectifies-objectify~~ a larger community such as “the disabled.” ~~In the case of Sight Corrections, these individuals are philosophers, vision scientists, ophthalmologists,~~

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Thus, unlike many other works on this topic, Mounsey's stands out for not focusing ing on institutions and institutional thinking.

The book is divided into three sections, each of which contains three chapters. The first section, entitled "Philosophy," reviews what Mounsey sees as the guiding theories related to visual impairment in the eighteenth century.

This section develops a framework and establishes a case for the arguments to be found in the following two sections. In the first of its chapters, Mounsey outlines how British ophthalmology in this era was found lacking in both approach and sophistication in comparison to its continental counterparts. As he observes, "If I were writing a history of ophthalmology in the eighteenth century, I would ignore England and concentrate on the technical developments in France and the pioneering work of Antoine Maître-Jean" (7). The rest of this section examines the discipline of disability studies from the late twentieth century onward (and how they inform a contemporary epistemology of sensory impairment) and the methods of textual analysis that he employs in the following sections.

The second section, entitled "Medicine," examines the early experimental study of visual impairment in the eighteenth century and its roots in the philosophy of mind. Mounsey does not discuss the roots of the mind-brain duality that other works cover. Nor does he recognize the earliest discussions about the mind and brain through the analogy of blindness, as René Descartes did, which was to serve as a foundation for the Enlightenment. However, this section identifies the most important experiment in this era—Cheselden's study of a boy who recovered his sight after early sight

loss. This section also discusses the analyses of later philosophers, such as

John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who used blindness

and deafness as the foundation of the theory of mind.

The third section, entitled “Lives,” the most significant in this study, examines the biographies of three outstanding British poets with visual impairment—Thomas Gills, John Maxwell, and Priscilla Pointon. Mounsey argues that he not only attempts to “tell the biographies of blind people to balance the discourse of the doctors but [also] to confront the disease-treatment-cure paradigm that is so often foisted upon the eighteenth century as the century of medicalization” (99). Thus, by highlighting such diverse poets, Mounsey provides both a departure from the scientific and medical epistemologies of the era and an insight into the moral, social, and intellectual history of seventeenth-century British society.

The book has three significant flaws. First, Mounsey’s analysis of eighteenth-century philosophies of mind has many gaps. A book of this gravity needs to identify discussions about the mind and brain as the foundation of the eighteenth-century philosophy of visual impairment. In this respect, Mounsey’s omission of David Hume’s work is puzzling , as is his inclusion of Locke’s, based as it was on William Molyneux’s “Problem” (the blind regaining sight), rather than that of Descartes to which Molyneux’s responded. An analysis of the original texts from this era, rather than a survey of secondary-source literature , would have helped.

Secondly, Mounsey introduces a number of visual images, none of which appears to have

alt text or verbal images, which in a modern book about visual impairment is a significant oversight. Thirdly, although Mounsey briefly summarizes his study in two paragraphs at the end of chapter nine, he could have been presented a farther-reaching discussion in a concluding chapter. As a result, the book seems to end in mid-air.

Despite these issues, this highly readable book is an important review of marginalized writers and a convincing narrative of exclusion in the eighteenth century. Moreover, as a penetrating critical analysis of the era's medical approach, written by a person with a visual impairment, it is a significant contribution to the field of disability history and the history of impairment.

Simon Hayhoe
University of Bath